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ABSTRACT

One of the most important decisions speech communication basic course directors make is the selection of the textbook. The first consideration in their choice of text should be whether or not the proposed text covers the units integral to the course. A second consideration should be whether or not the text covers the special topics integral to the course. Directors should also keep in mind that textbooks are written for and read by two different audiences: those who teach and those who are taught. What appeals to or impresses the first group does not always appeal to or impress the second group. Also, directors should consider who will be teaching the course: will it be seasoned faculty who will expect and demand some latitude in how they do things or inexperienced graduate students who need considerable guidance. While ancillary packages are provided with many textbooks today--packages that contain teaching aids such as manuals, test banks, computer software, video tapes, and discs--directors should remember that these services perhaps benefit the instructor more than the students; they also drive the price of the textbook up. Finally, directors should be aware that there are other options available today besides the major textbooks on the market; many publishers will help faculty produce their own custom-made textbooks. (Contains 24 references.) (TB)

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SELECTING TEXTS AND COURSE MATERIALS

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SCA Shortcourse
Directing the Basic Communication Course
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One of the most important decisions basic course directors make is the selection of the textbook for the course in that the text introduces students to basic concepts of the field and in many ways defines the boundaries of their knowledge of communication. While a good instructor can make up for many of the deficiencies of a poorly selected textbook, a well chosen text and accompanying materials can serve to enhance instruction in numerous ways.

Basic Principle

The selection of a text and materials should rest on an even more important decision, the design of the course itself. The former should serve the latter, or as Larry Hugenberg has put the matter, "The course should dictate the selection of the text not vice-versa."

Criteria for Selecting Texts

Basic Considerations

The first consideration should be whether or not the proposed text covers the units integral to the course. If you have a public speaking basic course, the text should cover the types of speaking assignments you expect of your students. Since basic textbooks compete in the same market, a number of books, similar in format, will cover the major units of the public speaking course. In a hybrid or blend course, you may

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have more of a problem. If, for example, you deem interviewing a necessary unit, not all texts will cover that particular unit.

A second consideration concerns special topics which may be important to your course. If you have a large number of students with high communication apprehension, you will want to find a text with a significant section on that problem (Pelias). If your clientele are heavily involved in graphics, technological students, for example, you may place a major emphasis on the presence of a detailed and thorough discussion of visual aids.

The Two Audiences of Textbooks. You will also want to see how the book highlights and emphasizes its concepts. Items such as key terms at the first of chapters, discussion questions, problem solving situations, illustrative narratives, and application problems can all emphasize concepts and enhance learning.

Keep in mind that textbooks are written for two audiences. The first is the author's colleagues, other basic course teachers. The book must satisfy their concepts of what a text should be. If the text is not attractive to other teachers, it will not sell nor will it garner the author respect and its attendant rewards. The author should also write for the students who will be using the book. After all, the purpose of a textbook is to instruct. One would think these two audience would be complementary, but that condition

does not always exist. What is important to the one is not always what is important to the other.

A recent study has surveyed student reaction to basic course texts. Students were asked to rank in importance the various components of their textbooks such as preface, index, study questions, etc. The results indicated "that students perceive boxed or highlighted material, chapter summaries, chapter outlines, margin comments/explanations, and glossaries of key terms. vocabulary as the most useful textbook features when studying and learning the course material . . . (and) that they find suggestions for further readings, author index, footnotes or endnotes, chapter exercises, and the text preface/introduction to be least useful" (Yoder and Davilla 6).

Though the study did not articulate reason behind the rankings, it seems to me that division is clearly motivated. Students value those portions of the text which aid them in their task, learning the material. They do not value those portions of the text which are included to pique the attention of the potential adopter (the preface) or those portions included to impress our colleagues that we have indeed read significant material relevant to the topic ("further readings").

Who Will Teach the Course? Another major consideration, again as Hugenberg has pointed out, is "Who will be teaching the course?" If your instructors are newly arrived graduate students, you will need to select a text and materials easily

used by beginning teachers. If your basic course faculty is composed of experienced teachers, then you may select materials which allow a wide range of teaching styles and approaches.

Other Considerations

In addition to deciding how thoroughly a proposed text covers important areas of instruction, other factors may influence your decision as well. The general style of the book should fit with the outlook of faculty and students. Some texts approach the communication emphasizing theoretical aspects of communication while others approach the topic from the liberal arts outlook. At least one is openly and firmly grounded in Christian principles (Dodd and Lewis). Still others are more handbooks than textbook and provide a how-to-do-it approach with little discussion beyond introductory remarks (Sprague and Douglas).

The reading level of your students may have a bearing on the matter. Basic course texts are available in varying levels of difficulty, and choices will need to be made accordingly (Schneider 1991; Schneider 1992).

You may also want to make some judgments based on the appearance of the book. Sophisticated printing procedures now produce textbooks in full color with numerous illustrations. Simpler formats may limit the text to black and white illustrations. Still simpler and cheaper formats can be created via personal computers, and even typewriters, to supply printers with camera ready copy.

A useful addition to a textbook is a well designed workbook which provides students with course information, exercises, assignments, and critique sheets. If a suitable workbook does not come with the textbook, you might give thought to creating your own. Even a simple packet at the local photocopy shop may save your department and course budget a significant amount in photocopy costs.

Ancillary packages are now provided with many textbooks. These packages will typically include materials such as teachers' manuals and test banks. Recently they have been expanded to include such items as transparencies masters, computer software, and video tapes and discs. The array and allure can be impressive. How much actual value they represent to teachers is, however, a debatable issue.

One professional in the textbook trade referred to the present situation as "the ancillary wars" implying that textbooks are being chosen not on the basis of their content but on the flashiness of their accoutrements (Rackliffe). The view was echoed by others who see ancillary packages functioning more as marketing devices than an educational aids. Their impressions are that the ancillary packages make books attractive to teachers, but once a book is adopted, few make full use of the ancillary package (Carter; Grisanti). The conclusion of the matter is simple: Make sure you buy the steak and not the sizzle.

Thoughtfully considering ancillary packages and their utility raises another consideration in the selection of a

text. As instructors we receive complimentary copies of the books we use and so may be insulated from the price of the book. Everything that goes into the textbook--ancillary packages, permissions, illustrations, indexing, etc.--is ultimately paid for by the students buying the book. A college education is an expensive venture, no matter what the school. By considering cost among the criteria for textbook selection, we can have a small effect on the financial burden borne by students.

Supplying the Textbook

Course directors have two basic ways of supplying the textbook selected for the course: (1) ordering books and materials from a national publisher and (2) creating their own texts and materials.

National Publishers. If you want to entertain texts published by national publishers, the matter is simple. Cruise the books vendors at conventions, talk to sales representatives, or write, on departmental letterhead, the publishers indicating your interest in a book. They will readily supply you with an examination copy. Given the number of students we deal with and *ergo* the number of potential sales, basic course directors are very popular with book companies.

Creating Your Own. The second method is to create your own materials. The advantage of creating your own materials is that you have control over all facets of the text. If you choose this approach, you again have two options: (1) use the

services of a custom publisher and (2) publish the materials locally. For example, two companies, Kendall/Hunt and McGraw-Hill, have extensive programs in custom publishing. Kendall/Hunt is primarily a custom publishing company while McGraw-Hill is a traditional publishing house that has recently added a custom publishing division. With both companies, the basic process is the same. You produce the manuscript and they put it into book form.

With Kendall/Hunt, you would be assigned to work with a regional editor. After deciding the type of book you wish to produce (size, binding, illustrations, permissions needed, etc.), you deliver a completed manuscript to the associate editor. The manuscript is sent to a production editor for proofreading and typesetting. Camera ready copy is printed in about sixty days after its reception; other manuscripts in one hundred twenty days. If the book is deemed of interest beyond your specific course, it is marketed via direct mailing. The proposed text should have a minimum guaranteed sale of two hundred copies (Noel).

McGraw-Hill has a similar program to publish manuscripts which you may write. The books may be campus specific, but they will be listed in the regular McGraw-Hill catalog. In addition to manuscript printing, McGraw-Hill offers an electronic data base system, Primis, for creating readers. The book's creator chooses materials from a menu, peruses these, then decides what to include in the final text and how to arrange the materials. Locally generated materials may be

included along with items from the database. The final product is then printed and bound. The minimum number of pages for a text is one hundred. The minimum number of copies printed is one.

The second option for producing you own materials is to make use of local printing facilities. These could be professional printers located in the community or the printing services of your school. Again, you would create your manuscript and deliver it for publishing. The final product would be then be sold to students. In addition to total control over the text, you or your department would also have the advantage of reaping all the profits from the sale of the materials. The disadvantage of the approach is that you would have to little or no editorial assistance in producing the text.

OTHER MATERIALS

In addition to the textbook, workbook, manuals, you may also want to give consideration to other materials. Classroom exercises can be found in a number of different sources. One is textbooks other than the one you selected. Convention programs in pedagogy may supply you with useful ideas you can incorporate into your course.

One of the best sources for exercises and assignments is *Speech Communication Teacher* published by SCA. The publication is a quarterly publication in the form of a newsletter. A year's subscription is ten dollars

You may also want to give thought to creating video materials. Such items a sample speeches, lectures, and exercises can be created or purchased. Some can be purchased in finished form. C-Span can supply a wide range of sample speeches. Camcorders now make production a relatively simple process. For a more sophisticated look, you may be able to take advantage of studio facilities on your campus.

Conclusion

In that they shape the nature of the learning experience, the basic course textbook and materials are of high import. Choosing the appropriate materials involves the creation of criteria based on the educational situation at a given school. The primary factor should be the design of the course. After that, such factors as subject areas, special sections, format, readability levels, and cost may all have a bearing on the final choice. In addition to choosing an available textbook, basic course directors may also create their own texts. Whatever approach is taken, the choice is well worth the deliberation and creativity that go into it.

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